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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 002092

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR  
DEFENSE FOR OSD/ISP/EURASIA (MACDOUGALL)

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SUBJECT: ARMENIA'S MOD SUPPORTS BROADER, DEEPER DEFENSE  
RELATIONSHIP

Classified By: Amb. John M. Evans, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

#### Summary

11. (C) In his first meeting with the Ambassador on September 20, Armenia's Defense Minister Serzh Sargsyan stated that Armenia highly valued its developing defense relationship with the U.S., stood ready to cooperate on an upcoming Defense Assessment and was preparing troops for deployment to Iraq. He expressed regret that Armenia was not able to participate in a NATO exercise in Azerbaijan and concurred with the Ambassador that the exercise cancellation helped neither side. Sargsyan said that while there were few concrete signs of progress from the Astana Summit on a resolution of N-K, he expected President Kocharian to be contacting President Aliyev within the next month or so to propose next steps. End Summary.

12. (U) On September 20, the Ambassador paid his initial call on Armenia's Defense Minister, Serzh Sargsyan. With Sargsyan were General Mikhael Melkonyan, Head of the MOD's Department of Foreign Relations and Military Cooperation and Colonel Hayk Kotanjian, Advisor to the Minister of Defense. DCM, DATT and ODC Chief accompanied the Ambassador. Press coverage of the meeting was both positive and accurate. After President Kocharian, Sargsyan is broadly considered to be Armenia's most influential political figure.

#### Parliament to Review Iraq Deployment in November

13. (C) The Ambassador opened by reviewing U.S. goals in the South Caucasus, thanking Armenia for its contribution to the war on terrorism and saluting Armenia's intention to deploy troops to Iraq. Sargsyan stated that Armenia's deployment was passing through the last stages of interagency approval, after which the Constitutional Court would review the terms of the planned deployment. The final package would then be sent to the National Assembly for final approval. Sargsyan estimated that the National Assembly would begin addressing the issue in early November. Sargsyan acknowledged that the deployment was a hot-button issue in Armenia, but predicted that the National Assembly would approve the deployment. He added that Armenia was obliged to participate in Iraq to the extent that it is capable.

#### Bilateral Military Relations

14. (C) Sargsyan expressed appreciation for the developing military relationship with the U.S. and expressed hope that it would continue to broaden and deepen. He reiterated Armenia's readiness to go forward with a Defense Assessment, saying that there were "no obstacles within the framework of the agreement," referring to limits on the assessment from considering issues relating to Nagorno-Karabakh. Ambassador Evans praised this step, adding that the Defense Assessment, which the USG is preparing to conduct, was a key tool for identifying ways to best use available resources to develop capabilities which can be used to support shared goals.

15. (C) Sargsyan told the Ambassador he remained convinced that the best use of FMF continued to be for the purchase of communications equipment, a point underscored by his government's interest in using national funds to supplement FMF. The Ambassador said the Defense Assessment was just the right tool for deciding how best to apply resources. ODC Chief suggested that the current pattern of purchases did not take into account the incomplete nature of Armenia's communications infrastructure.

16. (C) Sargsyan expressed satisfaction at press reports that the U.S. would maintain parity between Armenia and Azerbaijan on Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funding levels. The Ambassador pointed out that there had never been any thought in Washington of upsetting the existing military balance in the region. He noted that military assistance was a tool intended to help potential allies develop capabilities and reminded Sargsyan that Azerbaijan has been a key U.S. ally in the Global War on Terrorism, with boots on the ground in

various coalition operations. Sargsyan took the point, and said that Armenia "understands its obligations" and will keep its agreement to deploy.

Ambassador: Nobody Won When CBE-04 Was Canceled

17. (C) Ambassador Evans said that the U.S. fully supported NATO's decision to cancel Cooperative Best Effort 04 and regretted Azerbaijan's decision to not permit Armenian officers to travel to Baku. He noted that this was not a cause for rejoicing, adding that it was hard to see how this development would contribute to maintaining stability in the months ahead. Sargsyan concurred and said he would address this and other topics during a press conference in the near future.

Sargsyan Not So Pessimistic on Astana

18. (C) The Ambassador asked how the GOAM saw the results of meetings between Presidents Kocharian and Aliyev in Astana; we were disappointed at what appeared to be a lack of progress. Sargsyan had been briefed on the substance of the meetings, but seemed less pessimistic about their results. He said that it had been a good meeting; the first such one-on-one meeting for over a year. He praised the work of the Minsk Group and hoped that their efforts would continue. He said that we might know more about where things were heading "after a month or a month and a half," but gave no specifics about what to expect. The Ambassador thanked Sargsyan for the brief and took the opportunity that Amb. Mann would continue to have the lead for the USG on issues relating to N-K.

EVANS